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sources by men whose ignorance of natural science and of what is possible from an engineering point of view led them into naïve errors. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the conservation movement has also suffered because the men of science who fathered it were unfamiliar with the property institutions and economic forces of their time. The present work has helped to bridge the gap between the technology and the economics of conservation.

FRED G. TRYON.

The High Cost of Living. By FREDERIC C. HOWE. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1917. Pp. x, 275. \$1.50.)

Dr. Howe has been before the reading public so long that he needs no introduction. It follows that a book from his pen, bearing the above title, is sure to have readers. In this book there are so many things worth saying which are well said, that one would like to commend it as a whole, but to do so would be misleading. The good portions are the chapters describing coöperation in Europe. Some of the parts not so good are mentioned below.

The High Cost of Living deals with the conditions under which foodstuffs are produced. Thus it gets back at once to the land. The most unfavorable pictures of the farming world are presented, apparently for the ultimate purpose of introducing the remedy, which is a specific, the single tax.

One of the first of a considerable list of warped truths is found early in the book (p. 15), where it is stated that but one half of our cultivable area is cultivated. As here used this statement can have but one import: some one or something is to blame because it is not being cultivated. As a bald fact it is probably true that but half of the land which is physically capable of cultivation is so used. No doubt Dr. Howe would turn to the agricultural volumes of the census and prove that much of this land is in Illinois and Iowa. Before commenting on the fact that some of it really is in the best agricultural sections, let us notice that over 10 per cent of the neglected acres are in Nevada; land on which a jack rabbit works hard getting a living. Much more of this cultivable land is in western Texas, in Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. But a large share of the unmeasured millions of uncultivated acres in the United States are much more valuable uncultivated than cultivated. Other quantities of land are being put under cultivation slowly and are yielding good results.

It worries Dr. Howe to discover that 400,000,000 acres of land in farms are not cultivated at all. "How can we break up the 200,000,000 acres held in great estates, and throw open to use the 400,000,000 acres enclosed in farms but not cultivated by the owners?" Like the uncultivated land not in farms a great deal of this 400,000,000 acres of uncultivated land is in the semi-arid region. Much of it is used for pasture and it has not yet been demonstrated that it has under present conditions any higher use. The attempts to turn the pasture lands of the plains and basin country into arable land have resulted in two failures to one success, and the failures are frequently tragedies. Many millions of acres of this untilled farm land are in pasture throughout the humid section of the country. Pasture produces less per acre than arable land, but it costs less to make it produce, and the reasons for leaving it in pasture are, in the minds of the farmer, adequate. Erosion is prevented, fertility is not wasted, labor is saved. There are 84,000,000 acres of cultivable pasture land in the country, a tract the size of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. Of the remaining uncultivated land in farms a large part is put to some use, often good use. There is land in woods, or, without being classed as pasture, that is grazed more or less. Much land is not fit for cultivation on account of rock, or water, or topography. Dr. Howe should observe that a great deal of land is not being held "against the needs of society" so much as it is being held by the Almighty for future geological development.

Dr. Howe's complaint is not a criticism of the farmer, but a commiseration. "The farmer does not fix the price of his wheat as other producers of their products." The farmer has been told over and over that almost every one besides himself has the privilege of setting the prices on his wares. This is another way of saying that the farmer alone enjoys no monopoly. But does he not have about the same privilege of setting the prices on his goods that the merchant has on his? The farmer has the privilege of keeping his grain for home use, or awaiting a rise in the market which Dr. Howe seems able to forecast with the precision of the astronomer's prediction of an eclipse. The farmer may set his price and see what will happen. He may sell, or he may keep his goods. Many a farmer keeps horses on his farm eating a hundred dollars worth of feed a year, exercising his right to set prices. He sets a price on his potatoes in the fall and finds himself still in possession of them six months later with the market glutted. A mer-

chant sets a price on his clothing, and his customers, believing that they can do better elsewhere, leave him in charge of his wares till they are out of style. One great reason why the merchant seems to be an arbitrary price-maker is because he knows the market and sets a price which will move the goods, and by no means always at a profit. If there is any point at all to Dr. Howe's lament it must be that the farmer should enter the realm of monopoly, and, like others, hold up his customers.

The grain exchange comes in for a double portion of denunciation: "They deal in futures." And yet the farmers without exception deal in futures whenever they handle grain for themselves beyond the farm. The grain dealers, according to the author, all but openly steal from the farmer 15 to 25 cents a bushel on wheat through "short-weighing, over-docking and price-gouging." It is true Dr. Howe shifts the responsibility for this sweeping accusation to other shoulders, but he accepts the testimony. Now it so happens that there are farmers marketing their wheat through other channels, and getting the terminal market price for it, but not at a saving of 15 to 25 cents per bushel. Far from it. Rather at the same figure given them by these outlaws, or at a saving of a modest 3 or 4 cents—a saving well worth the effort.

Not only do the grain dealers take these unconscionable tolls almost before the very eyes of the farmer; they put the price of wheat down when the farmer sells and boost it when they sell. The farmer cannot hold wheat for this inevitable rise because he does not own the terminal elevators. True, but wheat can be stored on the farm just as economically as anywhere. Yet careful studies show that, one year with another, there is but a small margin of profit in storing. The cheese producers have almost as good facilities for storing cheese as has a dealer, but they rarely store; they are afraid to speculate and they want their money at once.

The movement of grain production into the West many of us had looked upon as a natural result of the distribution of soil, the favorable topography, climate, and drainage of the upper Mississippi Valley. But from *The High Cost of Living* we learn that this is not the case. "The railroads have destroyed farming in New York in order that they may enjoy the earnings that come from a thousand-mile haul from the Far West." In another connection the reader is told that the distributors have so discouraged the farmers of New York that they produce only 5 per cent of the food required for the city of New York. It would be useless

to go over a very great mass of statistical data to prove that there is still some important agriculture in the eastern states; that the great drawback to eastern agriculture is not the lack of railway facilities. A generation ago the West went through a struggle against the railroads, the belief at the time being that the railroads were holding up the western farmer for an inordinate charge for carrying freight. They must indeed have won a great victory if they induced the roads to put their charges so low as to work a hardship on the farmers at the very door of the great cities, with respect even to highly specialized products.

It may be of some slight interest to note that New York State in both 1900 and 1910 had the largest number of, and most valuable, cows of any state in the Union; and that she was outdone in 1910 in the total value of livestock by but five states; that the New York hay crop was second in tons and first in value; that she raised more than 10 per cent of the potato crop of the country, and produced dairy products greater in value than those of any other state. In fact there was really a very great deal of farming still going on in New York at the time of the last census. Pennsylvania boasts of the richest agricultural county in the United States, and produces the third most valuable hay crop. The dairyman of the East buys his grain of the western farmer rather than raise it himself because he has come to believe that it is cheaper to buy it than to raise it.

According to *The High Cost of Living* the packers have discouraged the eastern producers of livestock and now threaten those of the West. Just how they will prosper after the West also ceases to be a stock producing country is not suggested. The writer of this article is willing to submit that he had long been under the impression that his native state, which ranks first in the production of hogs, holds that distinction because of the advantages which she has in growing Indian corn as compared with New England and the Middle Atlantic States. Because of the railways we have territorial division of labor carried to a considerable extent. Should the present freight congestion continue we may have forced upon us the situation which Dr. Howe so warmly commends, community self-sufficiency. This would mean that the Eastern states would have to feed themselves and the West would have an undisposible surplus or resort to a very different type of agriculture.

It is stated that the banks are in collusion with the packers and grain monopolists, and whenever the latter want produce to flow

into the markets they let the bankers know it and they in turn threaten to call in the loans. The farmer, therefore, is put at a disadvantage and takes what he can get to avoid the fate of having his goods sold from him under the hammer. This startling evidence has not heretofore been widely published, and a large number of those to whom it is now divulged will call for the minutes of the last meeting.

Dr. Howe harks back to the good old times of barter at the village store, and praises without stint the conditions of that period. Now it has fallen to the lot of some of us to go carefully over the history of the farmers of a generation ago. Contentment is not the dominant note. The farmers were angry, discontented, and belligerent. Possibly Dr. Howe means longer ago than forty years by a "generation," but he is specific in speaking of the time when the laws of supply and demand were still in operation "and we had no cost-of-living problem." This was until into the nineties (p. 157). So apparently the decade or two before the middle nineties were the times from which we should take our patterns. We remember those golden agricultural days. Those were the times when wheat was selling on the western farms at 50 cents a bushel; when hogs brought 3 cents a pound; cattle about the same. A little earlier the farmer's wife made butter at 8 cents a pound and sold eggs at 8 cents a dozen. These prices may have contained a competitive profit, but it was not apparent. Land was cheap, but it took the owners almost as many years to pay for their farms at \$10 an acre as it has recently taken their sons and grandsons to pay for the same land at \$100 to \$200 an acre. The farmers of forty years ago had as landowners one very great advantage; they could earn enough money for the initial payment much more quickly than can the young men of today. During the good times before the era of monopoly the farmers joined the Farmers' Alliance by hundreds of thousands and voted for free silver and an increase of paper currency. And their reason for this action was their poverty. About the time Dr. Howe sets as the beginning of evils, the farmers were getting well enough off so that agitators had hard work to get a following. More recently in the Northwest where the reliance has been mainly on one crop, and where they have suffered sorely from drought two years in succession, they have again undertaken to get relief through politics. It is a pity that they could not have gone ahead a little more calmly with some of the good reforms they had under

way. A group of farmers in Canada have done very admirably what the northwestern farmers might well do, and have done it almost outside of politics.

In more general terms Dr. Howe makes sweeping assertions that convey to the credulous reader the idea that the American farmer is about ready for charity or the poor-house. Many other writers have exaggerated the prosperity of the farmer. Surely they have made great progress since the days of 3-cent hogs to the time when there are three-fourths as many automobiles as voters in the state of Iowa. At an auction in southern Wisconsin a few days since \$13,000 worth of farm property was sold, and without exception each buyer paid cash. In spite of the oppression of the packer, the farmer receives, in many instances, for a discarded dairy cow \$100 as the meat price. For a good beef animal he gets as much now as many a team of horses brought twenty-five years ago. The yield from an acre of fairly good oats of last year brought at the market not less than \$45, and in many cases \$60. Many a farmer received \$30, \$40, or \$50 for the crop grown on an acre of corn, or wheat, or barley land. These are not averages, but the average is higher than ever before. There are spots in the country where crops were poor, where the people had a hard time to get along till another harvest. But no man who knows the cotton growers, or the grain growers, or the livestock raisers in typical sections of the country during the past year will take Dr. Howe's somber lines seriously.

Why should we not squarely face the situation as it is? Admit that we do not support as many people per square mile as France or Belgium or Germany because we are not driven to it, because our hired men get two or three dollars a day instead of 40 cents, because we have land in abundance and use it so that the laborers and farmers produce several times as much per capita as is produced by the laborers of those countries. Then we will concede that not much usable land is held out of cultivation, that our city people do not want to go to farming, and that a great portion of our big farms are being as well used as they would be if broken up into "three acres and liberty" holdings. For really a fifty-acre farm would not afford a living for a family on the greater part of the ranch lands of the Southwest and West. Having agreed on these facts we could begin to plan how to help the tenants of the Southwest, how to get credit for those who need it, how to bring the minority of our banks to time for overcharging their custom-

ers in interest rates. Let us take the testimony of the United Grain Growers of Winnipeg concerning the saving to be made by farmers on shipping their own grain to Europe—and it is not 50 or 75 cents a bushel. Let us remember that so long as private property exists those who hold it during a time of rapidly rising prices will make money by it. Let us not believe that the farmers are altogether without hope or prosperity until we have visited them and talked with them; all the time remembering that there are 7,000,000 farmers, and that while there are sections in which they are not prosperous it is not fair to assume that all are as badly off as the worst.

We will agree that tenancy may become a menace, and that public attention should be given to the settlement of our unoccupied lands. Nevertheless, so long as tenancy is a stepping stone to ownership, it is not altogether bad. We will agree that some limitations ought very likely to be placed on the ownership of land. We will find in fact a vast number of things to do including a reorganization of some marketing arrangements. But we must not indulge in such unprovable assertions as are found in *The High Cost of Living* concerning the rotting of crops on the ground, as though it were very general, or as though the farmer were not himself at least partly to blame for the trouble.

It may be necessary before we get far in solving the problems so in need of a solution to forget to advocate panaceas. Seldom in the history of the world have reforms come by any one stroke of genius. It is true that there would be no great incentive to own land should the government confiscate its value in the form of a tax. But neither would we care to own other income producing property with the value squeezed out of it. Let us apply heavy taxes to urban lands where the evils of landlordism are much worse than in the country, and while the great majority of our rented farms are owned by men with but a single farm each, and while the majority of our tenants are not oppressed, work for some plan to promote farm ownership rather than take away the property interest in land which is one of the strongest incentives to land ownership.

It is all well and good for a single-taxer to believe in his vision, but in trying to realize it, it would seem to a skeptic to be better to face the issue squarely, to confine oneself to the facts as they are, rather than to undertake to prove by statements, no matter

how honest, that reform is demanded by deplorable conditions, conditions which to most people are not apparent.

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